POLICY BOARD
FALL REPORT
2021

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1. INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN/COVID RESPONSE

VRABE has fully complied with Governor Lamont's Executive Order #13G, the Vaccination Mandate. All VRABE teachers working in Cooperating District towns have been fully vaccinated. As will be set forth more fully in the "Programmatic" section, we have several teachers instructing exclusively in a remote mode, with no physical presence in any of our sites. As they are not "individuals working in public or non-public pre-K-12 schools" they do not fall under the Order's purview. If their instructional mode changes, we'll ensure they comply with state and local orders.

Our general approach is to comply with the stricter of VRABE's policy or that of each member town. Our policy still calls for wearing of masks in the classroom at all times, physical separation, and monitoring of physical symptoms of staff and students. We very much understand that circumstances vary by town, and will willingly comply with whatever requirements your individual system deems appropriate.

2. FINANCIAL

a. State & Local Funds

You may recall from the ED-244 the total budget for FY 2021-2022 is $1,114,387, a 2.8% increase from the last pre-COVID budget year, FY 2020. Recall also that we decreased last year's FY2021 budget in anticipation of our member town's fiscal constraints in dealing with COVID.

Our budgeting anticipated a gradual increase in enrollment this year as we recovered from the pandemic, and we planned classes accordingly. The COVID Delta Strain impacted this, and while our enrollment is recovering, it is at a lower pace than projected. The largest (in numbers and percentage) decrease

occurred in our ESL program. Our GED enrollment has reached pre-COVID numbers, and our NEDP program has actually expanded. Given all these uncertainties, it is our goal to maintain a flat or even reduced budget for next year.

VRABE's per-student cost remains below the state average, and below (sometimes dramatically so) many other towns and Regional Providers. For example, VRABE's per pupil cost for 2020 (the last year data is available for other districts) was $2,163; Manchester's was $5,857, EASTCONN's was $4,886, and Norwich's was $2,538. Those programs with lower costs generally don't offer all high school completion options or a full range of programming. Several programs throughout the state offer only GED as a high school completion option, yet have higher costs. Bloomfield and Hartford, for example, offer only GED completion, with respective per-pupil costs of $3,498 and $3,568.

While we continue to provide a high-quality program with a full range of offerings at a very reasonable price, we know that statewide enrollments are dropping (see below) and our focus for the 2021-2022 fiscal year will be cost reduction.

b. Program Enhancement Projects (PEP) Grants

We're extremely excited to announce VRABE was awarded a total of $220,348 in PEP Grants, an increase of $32,348 over last year. These are federal pass-through funds designed to enhance targeted programs. The CSDE last year informed all Adult Education Programs that the number of Grantees would be reduced, and competition for them increased. Our entire team was focused on submitting competitive applications for these funds.

VRABE developed a Certified Nurses' Assistant (CNA) program for ESL students that includes the following elements:

- A dedicated ESL class focusing on medical terminology for students in the program;
- A partnership with Manchester Community College (MCC) to provide a dedicated CNA class for VRABE students;
- A partnership with Ellington Ambulance Corps to train and nationally certify CNA students in Emergency First Aid, CPR and AED devices;
- Practical experience at a facility designated by MCC
- All fees and expenses (course tuition, test application, and CPR certification fees, books, etc.) for VRABE ESL students.

As with all our PEP Grants, this program is open to <u>all</u> member towns.

Specific Grant amounts are as follows:

Workforce Readiness (CDP, NEDP):	$30,000
Family Literacy (Elementary ESL, GED):	$50,000
Expansion of National External Diploma Program:	$30,000
Transition to Postsecondary Education & Training:	$40,000
Integrated English Literacy/Civics Education (CNA):	$70,348
TOTAL:	$220,348

c. State Cap on Adult Education Reimbursements

The preliminary state grant cap percentage is currently estimated at 6.38%, though the state has not finalized that figure. The descriptor "CAP" represents the percentage by which all town's state Adult Education Reimbursement Grant will be reduced by the state – a "CAP" on their payment to your district. I will plan to give the most recent estimate at our December individual meeting.

3. PROGRAMMATIC

a. Increased use of Remote Learning options

An unexpected finding in our shift to full remote learning, commenced in April 2020 and continued through the 2021 school year was that for some students remote learning was the only practical option for continuing their education. Due to various barriers – job requirements, child care responsibilities, transportation constraints, social anxiety issues, etc. they could not commit to a regular schedule of class attendance. As a result we have expanded our offering of remote learning options to ensure that we will always be able to offer GED, ESL and other classes remotely, during mornings, afternoons and evenings. This shift will be a permanent part of our program, and has not affected our ability to offer in-person classes, which remain a better option for most learners.

b. Pre-Apprenticeship Program

In addition to our new CNA program, we have developed a Pre-Apprenticeship Plastics Manufacturing Partnership with Dymotek, a leading national plastics manufacturer located in Ellington and the Connecticut Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship Training. A pre-apprenticeship program, by definition, has a documented partnership with at least one Registered Apprenticeship program. This program is being funded by Vernon Public Schools, but is being

developed and administered by VRABE and is offered to all VRABE and member town students. Some of the features:

- Open to both Adult Education students and high school students;
- Consists of a classroom component (3 classes - Math for Manufacturing, Workforce Readiness, Plastics Manufacturing) and onsite work at one of Dymotek's 2 facilities;
- Up to 200 Apprenticeship hours credited towards the Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Program for Plastics Manufacturing;
- Dinner and transportation to and from Rockville High School and Dymotek provided free of charge;
- Partial transportation reimbursement for outlying towns;
- Program is 2 days per week, from 12:30 – 8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays;
- Students given $100 per week stipend for successful completion of the week.

The classes begin second semester, and I'll be reaching out over the next week or two with additional information.

c. Certification Courses

We continue to offer The National Retail Foundation's Customer Sales and Service Certification Course, designed to teach ESL students the English language in context and simultaneously give them the opportunity to earn a nationally-recognized certificate that employers value. We offered two sections last year, one in the fall and one in the spring.

We also continue to offer, in partnership with the Hockanum Valley Community Council (HVCC), ServSafe Certification Course for our students. Offered primarily to our ESL students, this course is designed to enhance employability by giving students the entry-level food handling certification. This course also has a Volunteer/Community Service component, as we have found this is an excellent way to learn English contextually. The course will be held at HVCC, and will be open to all VRABE ESL students.

d. CTE Partnership

Through an ongoing partnership with Manchester Adult and Continuing Education, all VRABE students are eligible to enroll in any of their Career and Technical Education courses (e.g., Microsoft 365-Word and Excel), Keyboarding, Culinary Arts, Customer Service, ServSafe, and ACT WorkKeys (workplace documents, graphic literacy, and applied mathematics).

e. Enrollment

Enrollment in Adult Education throughout the state closely tracks the state's Unemployment Rate – at least until March of 2020. When unemployment rates are low competition for labor increases, mitigating the impact of not having a high school diploma. When unemployment rates increase, opportunities for those without a high school diploma evaporate, leading many to VRABE and other Adult Education Providers. The sudden, dramatic increase in March 2020 unemployment deviated from this pattern. The decrease in enrollment from the last pre-COVID year (2019) through 2021 was 44% for the state, and 37% for VRABE. See charts at the end of this report tracking Connecticut's Adult Education Enrollment first with the Unemployment Rate, then with VRABE's enrollment.

4. TECHNOLOGY

a. New CSDE Student Information System

The CSDE's new adult education student information system, LACES, is almost fully implemented. We're still learning how to take full advantage of its many options, though we're finding it very capable.

b. eTesting

All adult education students must take several standardized assessments to determine placement level and to measure progress. eTesting for these assessments has been a requirement for several years. While we are able to test small groups of students in the classroom, we still administer remote tests extensively, primarily to those who enroll in remote learning classes.

c. Chromebook & Loan Program, Online Registration

We ordered additional Chromebooks at the end of last year to support our remote-learning students and for those with technology barriers. We continue to experience difficulty with the loaner program, and are considering significant changes for next year. We balance these difficulties, though, with the need of our students and our desire to remove their barriers to learning. We also developed and implemented an online registration process, speeding up the process for most students. Finally, we developed "Hubs" in several member towns (Griswold, Colchester, Wethersfield) to speed student access to technology. At each Hub we have a storage box with 4 Chromebooks for student use, a number of GED and ESL textbooks, and other commonly used instructional materials. The Site Administrator is able to give the student immediate access to all materials, including loaner Chromebooks.

5. PERSONNEL

a. Openings

As with many employers throughout the nation and in Connecticut, we frequently find it difficult to replace personnel who leave VRABE. This is particularly difficult for Science educators and technology support. We advertise regularly, locally and through our statewide professional organization. Adult Education is a specialty area, and the pool throughout the state is limited.

b. Retirements

Our long time ESL & GED Coordinator, Dr. Claudia Nunn, retired this past June after serving Adult Education students and staff at VRABE for over 12 years. She brought deep commitment to adult education and has been instrumental in our success.

Richard Welk served 12 years as VRABE's Technology Coordinator, and is stepping back to part time work. He was very active in CAACE, our statewide professional organization, and oversaw the transition to remote learning. Few can match his combination of technical knowledge, interpersonal skills and dedication to students.

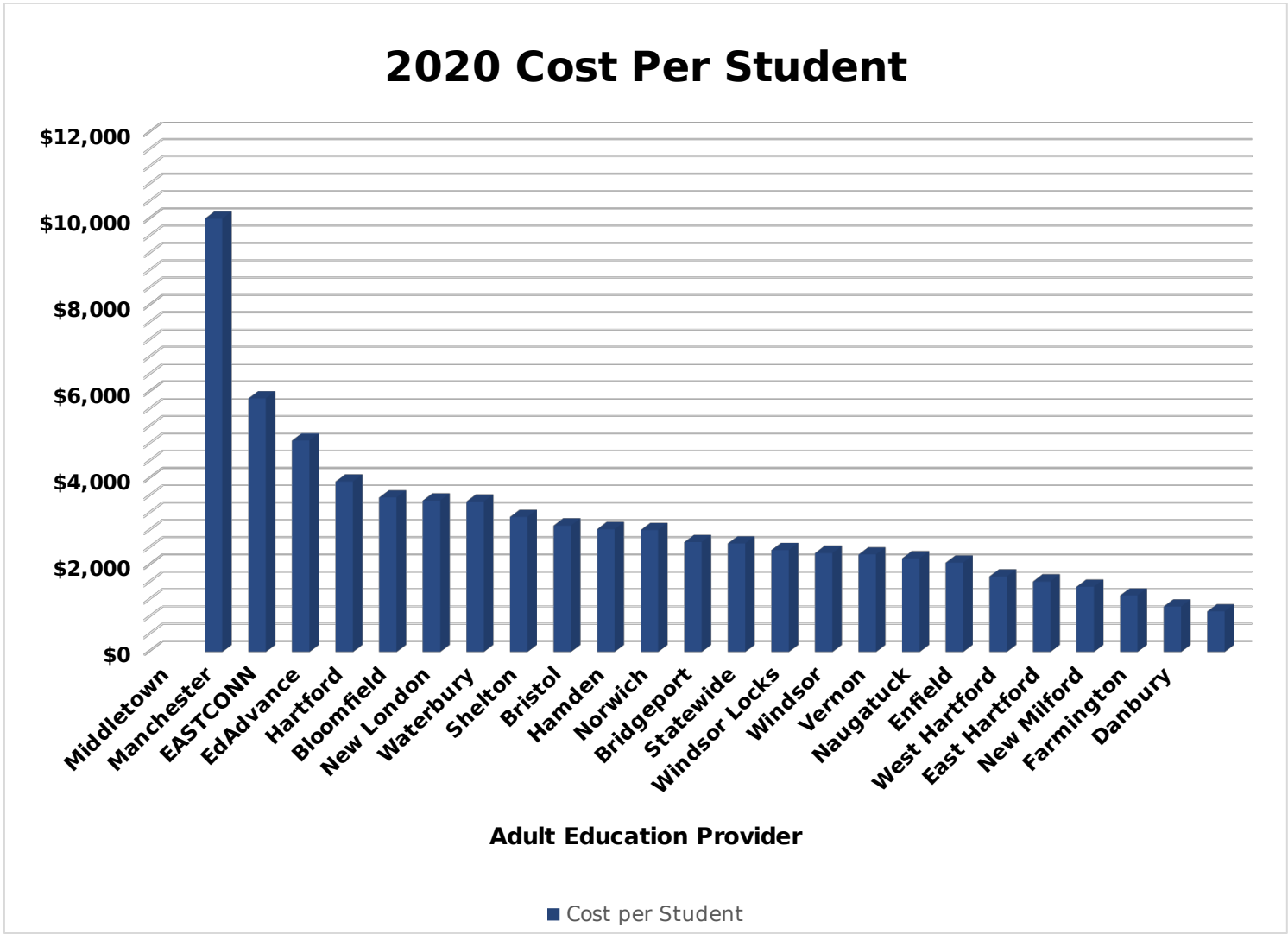
Dr. Nunn's ESL Coordinator responsibilities have been assumed by Cortney Gerlach, who formerly served as Site Administrator at our E.O. Smith location. Her GED Coordinator responsibilities have been assumed by Svetlana Smith, who currently serves as Coordinator of our Family Learning and Connecticut Adult Virtual High School programs.

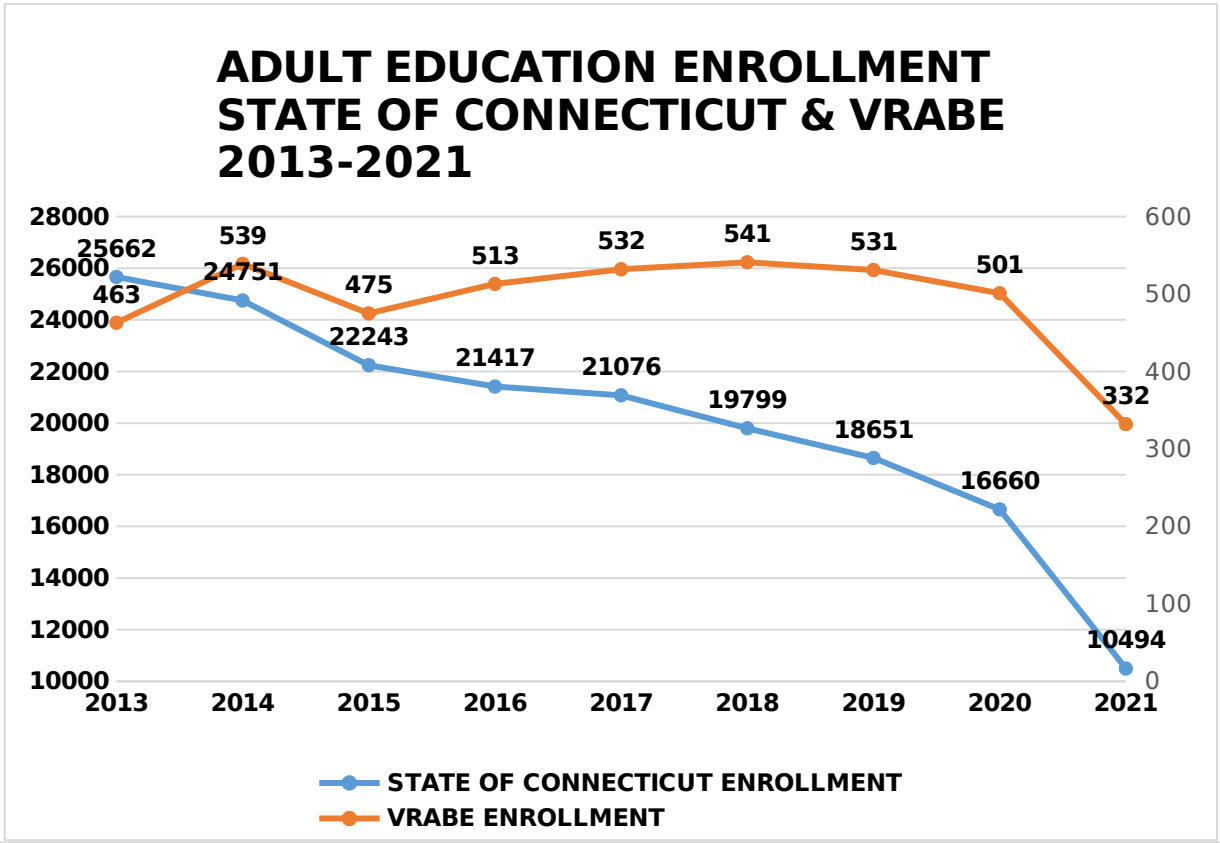
c. Shout Outs

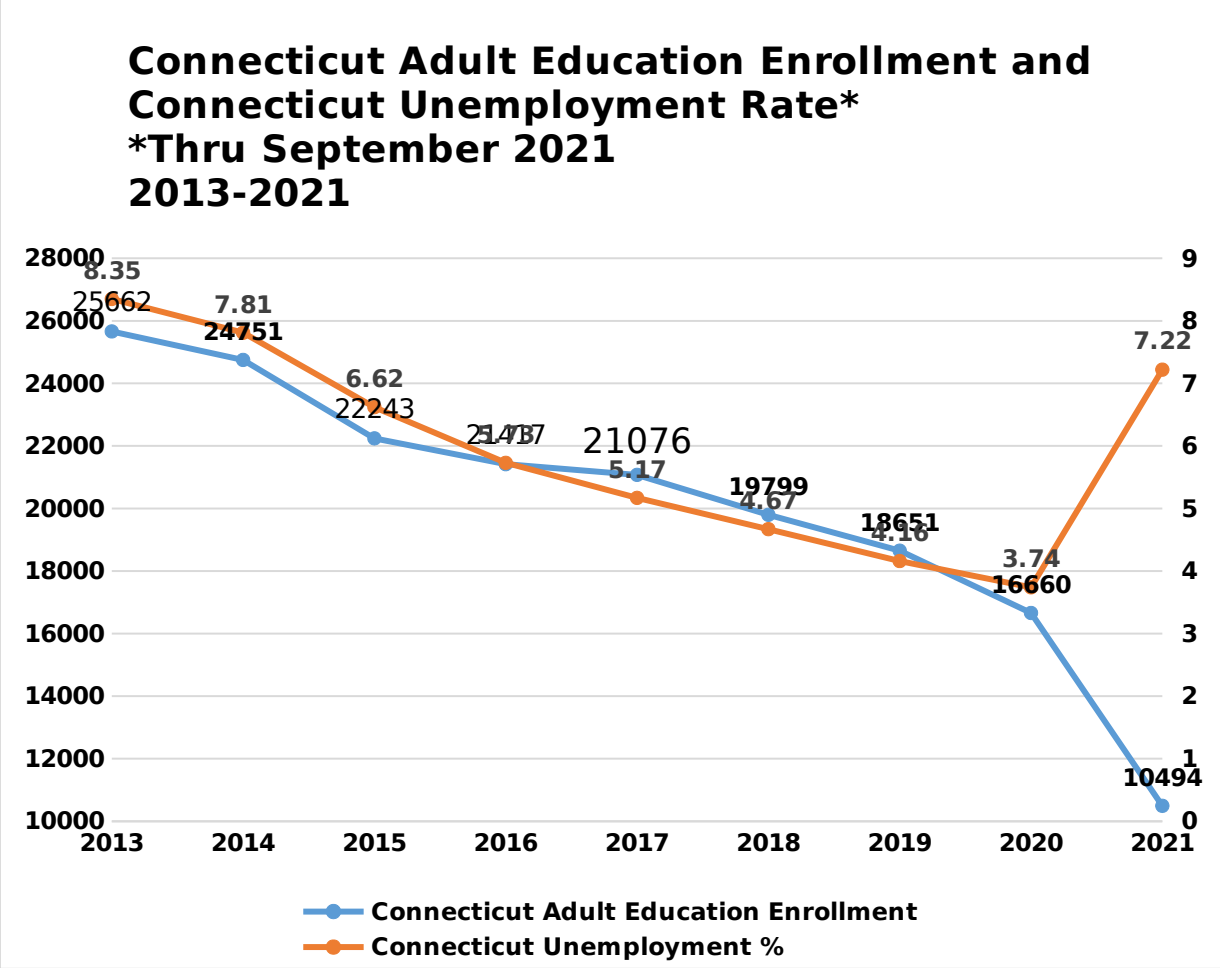
A Shout-Out to Diane Smith-Sanders, awarded the VRABE Educator of the Year Award at our meeting in August. Diane, who's in her 4th year with VRABE, teaches our Customer Sales & Service Certification Course and our Pre-GED classes. Students taking the certification course have over a 90% pass rate, and Diane will hold additional classes for those that fall short the first time. She's most supportive of our Pre-GED students, many of whom struggle with both the material and the technology. Diane is a guiding light to all students, and we're most fortunate to have her represent VRABE.

SEE CHARTS BELOW

- 2020 Cost Per Student, Adult Education Programs
- Adult Education Enrollment, State of Connecticut & VRABE, 2013-2021
- Unemployment Rate & Connecticut Adult Education Enrollment, 2013-2021


2020 Cost Per Student
$12,000
$10,000
$8,000
$6,000
$4,000
$2,000
$0
Middletown
Manchester
EASTCONN
EdAdvance
Hartford
Bloomfield
New London
Waterbury
Shelton
Bristol
Hamden
Norwich
Bridgeport
Statewide
Windsor Locks
Windsor
Vernon
Naugatuck
Enfield
West Hartford
East Hartford
New Milford
Farmington
Danbury
Adult Education Provider
Cost per Student





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Serving the Adult Education needs of

Ashford Bolton Colchester Coventry East Windsor Ellington Glastonbury
Griswold Mansfield South Windsor Tolland Vernon Wethersfield Willington